

Revelations

by D.M.P

Category: Animorphs
Genre: Adventure, Fantasy
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 1999-10-11 09:00:00
Updated: 1999-10-11 09:00:00
Packaged: 2016-04-27 09:46:02
Rating: T
Chapters: 1
Words: 19,677
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: The Ellimist is dying and the dimensions are decending into Chaos. Can the Animorphs stop this?

Revelations

> <meta name="Generator"> **

Author's Note:

Revised: June 13th, 2000.

Hey, I tweaked the story up a bit. Expanded on some weak scenes, fixed the grammar here and there. Hopefully, this story is now better than before.

I hope that you readers out there don't mind the religious aspect in this story. And to all you Christians out there, I'm hope I'm not offending your beliefs in any way with this piece. I am not biased against Christianity, nor am I Anti-Christ in any way.

In addition to that, there has been some plot differences in this story and the regular Animorphs canon (character background, in particular.) In this story, Jake's religious background has changed and I hope that you don't mind. Keep in mind that this is fan fiction, and if people can put Rachel and Marco together, or have Tobias have several long-lost siblings, I'm sure I could be allowed this off-canon change. ^_^

I apologize now if I offend any readers with the following story, for the point of this tale is for entertainment purposes only.

**

REVELATIONS

by D.M.P.

Chapter 1

Jake sat on the edge of his pew as he stared at the head of the church. The minister at the front droned on about God and his angels and the creation of the universe. Jake liked the quiet. These Sunday mornings were the only time in his life now that he had sanctuary from the secret war he was fighting, and so Jake listened with half an ear, doubting what the preacher said. Who was to say that there is a God? Jake looked at Tom who sat right next to his mother. Tom's face was calm and expressionless, but Jake could only see that vile Yeerk wrapped around his brain. Thinking of the pain that was hidden away inside his brother and inside himself, Jake wondered quietly. How could a supreme being be looking down at us, watching us, but let such infernal things like Yeerks exist to cause such pain and sorrow? If there was a God, why wasn't He helping him and his friends in their time of need?

The light shone through the tall stained glass windows upon figure of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, hung above the altar. Underneath were the stone statue of the Virgin Mary with a beautiful pale-winged angel standing behind her, his hands on her shoulders, silent and solemn faced. Jake remembered coming here almost every single Sunday of his life. He had seen that statue so often he could picture it with his eyes closed.

Jake's family was always the religious types. Faithful churchgoers, his parents believed in religion very deeply. However, of recent times with his secret war, Jake's train of thought went the other way. And how horrible that fact was! Especially at dinnertime, when his family said grace. How could Jake be grateful that there was food on the table and believe the false claim his father said, the prayer for "God to watch over and protect them," when the Yeerks are here, turning everything into a living hell? His brother was suffering in the private misery of his own head even, but will any supernatural being descend from above to help him!? _No!_ Jake thought, blinking away angry tears at the thought. _There is no one that can help us! Mom, Dad, why can't I tell you? Why do you have to believe such crap?_ Rubbing his sleeve quickly across his face, Jake felt a sudden pang of guilt at what he just thought. He was in church, for goodness sake! Who thinks those thoughts in a church?

"Now let us rise and-," Suddenly the minister stopped in mid-sentence. Jake looked around. Everyone was suddenly stone-cold still. A man in the back was discreetly blowing his nose, the tissue posed in front was his face. In the pew in front of ahead, a women was frozen in place, one finger extended as she scolded her active toddler, who had jumped up from his seat. The three-year-old was suspended about six inches from the ground as he was jumping off the pew bench. Jake's own father was locked in position as he looked at his wrist watch.

JAKE, said a voice from above.

"Ellimist," Jake muttered under his breath.

The blue being appeared. It said, YOU HAVE TO COME WITH US.

"What?"

The Ellimist usually appeared with a question or option, having ulterior motives. The Ellimist said that it never intervened in matters of lower dimensions. So why was he demanding something so bluntly now?

The Ellimist seemed to read his thoughts. ALL WILL COME IN TIME.

And within a blink of an eye they were gone from the motionless scene.

Jake looked around to see that he was in the Ellimist's realm. The others appeared around him, in their strange inverted forms that they usually appeared in during their trips to the fourth dimension. Jake felt his stomach flip. He never felt comfortable seeing his friends' insides.

"Geez, doesn't this violate that 'no interference' thing?" Marco asked.

The Ellimist looked gravely at the six. THE CRAYAK SOMEHOW FOUND AN ADVANTAGE IN THE GAME, ONE THAT WE ARE NOT SURE OF ITS POSSIBILITY. WE MUST NOW BE WARY OF THE TRICKS THAT COULD OCCUR. YOUR VERY LIVES ARE IN DANGER.

"So we're being sent here to your inside-out world for you to baby-sit us?" Rachel asked. "I take that what's happening here isn't your regular walk in the park."

Seeming to ignore this comment, the Ellimist continued. However, their surroundings suddenly changed so that each person saw themselves without the multi-dimensional views. WHILE YOU REMAIN HERE, it said, ONE OF THE LESSER BEINGS WILL BE HERE TO CARE FOR YOU. HE WILL BE YOUR PROTECTOR.

Cassie shivered for an unknown reason. "And how long will we be here?"

The Ellimist paused. YOU WILL REMAIN HERE FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES.

Then the spirit was gone.

I don't understand this, Ax wondered aloud. Why would the Ellimist take such extreme measures to protect us ?

"Are you OK?" Jake walked up to Cassie's side and offered her the coat to his Sunday clothes.

"Yeah, I think so." Cassie gave one more shudder and accepted the suit jacket. "It's just so cold around here all of a sudden."

Jake pulled up his shirt collar. "I guess you're right." Looking around, he saw something move in the darkness. "What's that?"

A shade of black moved forward toward them. "Hey, who are you?"

What are you talking about, Jake? Tobias flew to them, through the shadow. It seemed to give a silent cry as the hawk passed through its

translucent surface, then stopped its movement.

Jake blinked and looked again. "Oh nothing."

That thing, whatever it was, had disappeared.

Tobias ruffled his feathers. Is it just me, or is it a bit chilly in here?

Chapter 2

Not much time passed when someone appeared in front of the six children.

"I am T'saer, kin to Lucifer," he said graciously. "I shall be your Protector during your stay here."

T'saer looked like a normal human, but different somehow. Jake couldn't exactly put his finger on it. Was it the way he dressed? No, his simple clothing was plain and white, all except for a large unusual cape around his shoulders. That was large and elegant looking, covered in feathers. Underneath this cape a silver sword hung by his side.

"And where is 'here?' " asked Marco. "I'm not being picky here, but I'm not comfortable living in a bunch of black space, if you know what I mean."

T'saer gave a brief smile, and then Jake found what was so strange about him. There seemed to be a special glowing coming from him, not something you could actually see, but feel. It was something the Ellimist had inside him too, some kind of magical inner strength.

"You shall stay in the Seraph quarter with the other lesser spirits," T'saer said.

"Where is-" Jake started.

And then they were there before the sentence had ended. It was still a mostly blank space, but there was a ground to walk on and some houses up ahead.

Looking around, Jake saw the neat homes. Out of the corner of his eye, flashes of white running across the plain. He thought they reminded him of that black shade he saw earlier, but what were they exactly?

The Protector seemed to be reading his mind. "Those are unicorns," he said. "One of the lesser beings of this dimension. You probably won't ever have a chance to see them up close. Unicorns are timid, magical creatures and usually keep to themselves. Stay away from them. Pagan creatures are not to be trusted."

T'saer peered at the racing forms. "Strange," he murmured, "The unicorns seem restless. I wonder what is wr-"

Cassie dropped to the ground. "No!" she gasped.

"Cas-" Jake fell to his knees, hands at his chest. A sadness ever so

deep was felt in his heart. Jake felt his soul being crushed from within. Barely being able to lift his head, Jake saw his friends on the ground. Hot tears stung his eyes from the inner pain. Oh, God, the _sadness_... what was causing such despair? Jake tried to move, but was held back by the invisible feeling. He tried to open his mouth to sob, to scream, but could not. It was like he was dying inside. Please, someone, make it stop!

T'saer seemed not to pay any attention to then. His form was hunched over, like he was just punched in the stomach. With his head lifted and face full of pain, the Protector seemed to be listening to something from a far. Faintly, the sound was heard. A silent scream echoed through the air.

"Synl-Oni," he groaned. He glanced at his charges writhing below him and leaned over to Jake, the closest one to him. Touching his shoulder gently, Jake felt something warm brush against his heart. He closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, the houses he had seen earlier were gone; they must be somewhere else in this blank world. T'saer was crouching by a fallen figure of a woman. Her hair was golden and her eyes the fiercest blue, contrasting with T'saer's dark features. She was gasping for air. Her eyes rolled about in desperately as she tried to breathe.

From afar, Jake caught a glimpse of a black figure running away. _In the name of Azrael,_ it hissed as it disappeared.

"Quiet, now," T'saer was saying. And the cloak spread wide on its own. No, Jake was wrong; it wasn't a cloak T'saer was wearing. What kind of cape would be hinged at the shoulder-blades?

Jake gasped. The woman's feathered attire spread wide from her back as she lay on the ground. _Wings,_ Jake thought with mute surprise._ They have wings._

She stared up at the seraph, her complexion suddenly paling. Her wings fluttered weakly against the ground, as if she were trying to pump life back into herself by beating them together.

"Don't move."

He placed both hands on her shoulders. Bending his wings forward so that the tips trailed the ground, he seemed surround her with his presence. Then his tense wings seemed to droop and his shoulders slumped. Synl-Oni's eyes began to focus and be calm. Slowly, she began breathing in deep breaths.

Jake watched, wide eyed. Some of the quiet inner glow that T'saer had flowed into the fallen angel. She closed her eyes in a blissful sleep as the color began to flow into her cheeks. Her wings became calm and peaceful. T'saer was doing what he had done to him and his friends: giving them his strength.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

T'saer turned to confront the Ellimist. With a wave of its hand, the Ellimist pushed T'saer away. Synl-Oni gasped suddenly when the contact broke.

YOU ARE NOT TO COME IN CONTACT WITH A FADING SERAPH!

"Let me help her!"

SYNL-ONI IS ALREADY GONE.

The female seraph seemed to shudder as the last bit of glowing life T'saer had given her faded away. With one last flicker of her wings, Synl-Oni grew still.

"G'briel! Why did you do that?" T'saer pushed past the Ellimist and stopped short at the hushed form. Jake wanted to move forward, but when his feet stirred to rise, a wave of fatigue washed over him. His vision blurred and Jake closed his eyes. Opening them again, his sight slowly solidified again.

Then, before their very eyes, Jake and the two spirits saw the seraph fade and crumble away into nothing more than a pile of gold-white dust, then the dust blow away with an unknown wind into nothing. _From ashes to ashes, dust to dust_, Jake thought solemnly.

The Ellimist gave T'saer a stern look. IT IS USELESS TO HELP THE FADING.

T'saer turned away from where she once laid.

SYNL-ONI WAS ILL. THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO FOR THE ILL.

"What kind of remark is that?" T'saer demanded angrily. "I could have saved her from becoming one of the faded by giving her my strength!" He flapped his wings together in frustration.

DO NOT SPEAK TO YOUR SUPERIORS IN SUCH A MANNER, T'SAER, the Ellimist said curtly. YOU SHOULD BE CARING FOR YOUR CHARGES, INSTEAD OF FOLLYING WITH THE CURSED. IF YOU CANNOT CARE FOR YOUR OWN CONCERNS, YOU ARE UNFIT TO BE A PROTECTOR.

And with that remark, the Ellimist left as he usually did, quickly and silently.

Only when it did leave, did Jake have the strength to rise to his feet. That brief despair that he felt in his heart was gone. The others were still slumped over in a blissful silence, asleep.

"What happened?" he asked, bewildered.

T'saer remained still, staring at the spot of the fallen seraph. "I only tried to help," he whispered stonily. "For we all felt her pain. Answer me this, child. Is compassion a sin?" He glanced at Jake, aware that he had witnessed the whole thing.

"Everyone in this world is connected. When one is in pain, all are in pain." Picking up a faded white object, his wings drooped even further, not only for reasons of weakness. The seraph's feather kept its beauty for a split second. Then, the soft, white down crinkled and withered in the Protector's hand, as the feather faded into nothing more than dust. "I don't understand. The Order is immortal. Why are we suddenly fading to nothing?" He left the question hanging in the air.

Jake broke the silence with his own question. "What did you call the Ellimist?" he asked. "Gabriel?"

"That is a human corruption of his true name. He is known to your people as an archangel, my superior." The Protector folded his wings quickly. "I have been ignorant," he said in a somewhat embarrassed but stiff manner. "I must lead you to your quarters."

Walking down across the flawless, empty plain, the seraph came to the sleeping form of Rachel. "I have been foolish to transport all of us to the faded seraph. Now, I am weak, and vulnerable." He put a tired hand to Rachel's cheek.

"Protectors are suppose to be strong," he added bitterly to himself, and Jake wondered if T'saer was angry at himself for his error. _Do angels make mistakes often?_ he asked himself.

"The way is long, but we shall get their by nightfall," T'saer continued. He leaned over and brushed Rachel's hair back. It shone with the same golden grace as Synl-Oni. T'saer whispered in her ear softly. "Awake." One by one, T'saer woke them with that simple touch.

"I could help you if need be," a bland but youthful voice said behind them. Jake turned around to see another seraph standing before him.

"Protectors are supposed to be strong," T'saer repeated without bothering to look behind him. He leaned down and brushed Tobias's rust-red feathers and whispered again. "They are supposed to guard their charges with utmost grace and responsibility," He continued aloud as he straightened up. "They are not supposed to make mistakes." He sounded like he was repeating something that had been told to him many times before, probably by G'briel.

"You are young and unlearned. Do not take heart to what G'briel said. He knows not the concerns of a lesser spirit." The seraph put a hand on his wing. "You still need to master the virtue of non-interference."

Rachel made a slight groan and a yawn then sat up. "What is going on here?" she said. "I felt like my heart was being ripped out."

"I will help just this once," said the other seraph.

"Who's she?" asked Rachel.

Then Marco stirred. "But Mommy, I don't wanna go to school. I think I have a tummy ache."

The other seraph flapped her wings and the world around them disappeared for a moment, then came back with them in the place they had left.

"I will go now," the other seraph said.

She looked at Jake. Jake didn't like her. She acted too much like a robot than human. "T'saer is a good seraph. Young, but good," she stated solemnly. "If there is anytime you shall need me, just say my

name. It is Lzar-el, kin to Michael." Then she seemed to leap into the air. Her wings spread open to reveal their true splendor. When one great stroke of those magnificent wings, the seraph flew across the vacant sky above was gone.

Tobias shook out his feathers, giving a thought-speech yawn. That was one strange experience I'd rather not have again.

Marco had now fully woken up. "You can say that again. First, I wake up to see the big blue coot at my bedside, and before I say a word, he takes me away to nothing-land, which then we all somehow get a severe case of heartburn at the same time, and now I wake up again to see angels flying in my face."

Angels? Ax wondered, getting up onto his hooves. His stalk eyes blinked sleepily as they untangled themselves and stirred about. Is that what these beings are called?

T'saer turned to him. "A human term." The sorrowful look had left his face, replaced with a blank passiveness like the one Lzar-el had. Then he directed his attention to the others.

"You will reside here. I will provide anything you need in exchange that you do not wander the grounds without my presence. Hidden dangers roam this realm, so beware any being without the wings of white." He paused, head cocked, as if he were listening to someone else speaking. "I shall have to report to the Ellimist quarter," he then added, somewhat shamefully. "But we are now linked as one. If you need me, just say my name and I shall come."

Upon leaping into the air, T'saer's wings flapped awkwardly with fatigue, but then burst with renewed strength as he left. Wing beats echoed in the air when he was long past the horizon.

Cassie walked into one of the abodes. "This is their idea of a home?"

Except for a dark blue opaque wall that separated each of the six rooms, the rooms were a pure white. Everything was either white or very pale-colored. The stone surface felt cold and new.

Marco walked in next. "I hope they have room service here," he commented. He wiped a forefinger across a stone counter top. "At least they have a good housecleaning."

Cassie sat on one of these stone seats.

"Coo coo."

She gasped and watched as a dove rustled right next to her from its perch and flew out the door.

Tobias watched the bird fly off. I feel like I'm in church or something, he muttered.

"I know," Rachel said. She sat next to Cassie. "And Jake seems like the only one dressed for it."

Jake took off his tie, embarrassed. This place did seem kind of intimidating. Almost scary was the fact that these religious things

Jake had been told about were suddenly coming to life. The most disturbing fact was that he was scared. Why should he be frightened by his own beliefs?

What is this with angels and white birds? Ax wondered. I have read something about them in your human library. Do they have something to do with your human culture?

"Religion, Ax. It's what you believe," Cassie answered.

Ax glanced at Jake with one stalk eye. If you believe it, then why are you surprised to see that what you believe is true?

"We're not surprised," said Jake. He thought that no one noticed his reaction. "Just... amazed. Don't your people believe in anything?"

Ax hesitated for a moment. It wasn't often that Ax talked about his own kind. My people's beliefs aren't the same. We believe in no higher powers or flying spirits. We only have rituals that are used to reflect upon our actions and our purpose in life. If my people believe in anything at all, Prince Jake, we believe in ourselves. Believing in yourself can be as powerful as any belief in a god.

Chapter 3

Cassie couldn't sleep. None of them could actually, but eventually each one dozed off in their separate rooms except for her. There wasn't really much else to do in this world, except sleep. That was a big feat in itself, since there was nothing comfortable to sleep on. Cassie got up and stepped outside. A faint snore (Marco perhaps?) was heard from one of the rooms, but all else was quiet.

Even though nothing really seemed to exist in this world, there was a night and day. Or at least something equivalent to it. The world remained as plain and motionless, except for the vague dimming of the sky. There was no moon or stars out, but the equivalent to that were faint lines criss-crossing the sky. Thick or thin, this endless threads of life flowed on for as far as the eye could see. Those lines were always there, and grew bolder as dark fell.

When he had returned earlier, T'saer had pointed out to her about how the Ellimists controlled every aspect of the universe with those lines.

"How come only the Ellimists control the lines?" Cassie recalled asking him.

"They do and do not," he had replied. "What they control is by their own influence and that of their superiors in the fifth dimension of space, and their superiors actions are dictated by their superiors in the sixth dimension and so on and so forth. We are the Order, servants to the Ultimate Authority. All of our actions are made as one, yet are separate in itself. As our saying goes, 'I am we and we are I.' "

"So where do you stand?"

T'saer had thought for a second. "We are the seraph, messengers to

the first four dimensions of length, width, depth, and time. I, however...." He paused in regret, then went on in monotone. "I was always different. G'briel had prepared me to be the final messenger of the Revelation, to take his place, but I think I have failed in some way. I was only given a second chance now to try to prove my worth."

"Revelation?" Cassie had asked, her heart skipping a beat. "You mean the Apocalypse?"

"Yes. I was to warn the people of the coming of evil and its rule over the lower dimensions. It is said in the Prophecy. But I am nothing but a disappointment, for G'briel has reprimanded me so many times upon the fact that.... that I should not interfere." T'saer let his wings droop a bit, and Cassie had thought how those wings expressed all the emotions he couldn't show with his face.

"He does not trust me to send this message without trying to help," T'saer went on. " 'We do not interfere,' is what he tells me. 'We are the Order, only the observers in this game, and the followers of the Prophecy and the Ultimate Authority.' I had made the mistake of showing concern for the people of the lower dimensions. Yet how can one not interfere in such a dismal time?"

Cassie had listened to what he said in shock. "Is the Apocalypse coming soon?" she couldn't help asking, with a hint of fear in her voice.

T'saer stared out at the lines for a few moments, then replied, "G'briel says that it has already begun."

Now, Cassie sat alone outside, watching the lines in the sky pulse and glimmer with life. _It is already here,_ she thought. Dread had overcome herself when that thought came. Oh, she was never the true religious type, but it made her blood run cold at the thought of evil coming to rule. Or it had come to rule. The Revelation has come already, right? Cassie could already think of the evil that came. Yeerks. What worried her was that according to the "Prophecy," it was only going to get worse. "What's going to happen to us?" she asked aloud.

Then something caught her eye when a white figure dashed across the plain. She turned around and there stood something that took her breath away.

A unicorn stood in front of her, its silvery silhouette standing out against the dark horizon.

"Oh my God," Cassie whispered, barely breathing.

The unicorn was all the wonder and beauty she had ever imagined. Hooves as dainty and pale as a newborn fawn's shimmered with the light of the glowing lines above. The mane and tail looked as if it were made of spun silk and its coat looked as if contained the light of the stars itself. Out all of its elegance, the most was shown in its horn. Made of spiraled ivory, the tip was ended in a point thinner than a needle and all the colors of the rainbow swirled in the glossy surface.

The unicorn softly nickered as it pranced it's hooves against the

ground. It trotted up a few steps toward her and stopped short.

Cassie didn't know what to do. The unicorn just seemed so perfect, so wonderful, that she was afraid that anything she did would corrupt its exquisite nature. The unicorn walked a few steps closer and whinnied softly under its breath. It was waiting... for what?

Finally, Cassie reached out with a cautious hand and stroked the muzzle of this animal. Something cool flowed into her fingers, up her arm and washed over her chest. She shivered with the sudden numb feeling. It felt as if the hairs on the back of her neck were standing on end and an abrupt feeling swept over her, a feeling of cold that made her flesh crawl. It was then Cassie knew that this creature wasn't a real unicorn.

The pseudo-unicorn tossed its head as the holy illusion vanished. A shade of darkness was revealed, its hand inside her chest and clutched around her heart.

Cassie felt the specter pull at something inside of her. She opened her mouth to scream, but all sound seemed to be cut from her throat. Cassie felt the world dissolving around her....

"Stop!" someone cried out. Cassie's half-closed eyes turned to see the Protector five yards away.

The shade hissed and stared at its opponent. T'saer stood ahead, sword drawn. "Put her down," he commanded. He didn't dare take a step forward, in fear of what the shade might do. Never in his existence had T'saer seen such a creature, and that thought scared him.

The shadow didn't attempt to attack. Waving a vaporous hand, the shade instead opened a hole in the sky behind it. _What is this?_ T'saer wondered. _A dimensional portal? But- but only Ellimists can create those!_

With a final hiss, the shade plunged through it, dragging behind a half-conscious Cassie. T'saer took a firmer grip on his sword and ran forward. Without looking back, T'saer leaped through with a flap of his wings. The portal closed behind him.

Chapter 4

"Cassie!" Jake snapped awake, his heart thumping. It hurt so bad, almost as bad as it did when Synl-Oni faded.

He heard Rachel run to the door to his room. "Cassie's gone!" she cried.

"What?"

"I just woke up with this horrible feeling and went to check on Cassie and-"

"What about Cassie?" Marco stepped into the room, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

You just woke up too? Tobias flew in, followed by Ax.

"Something happened to Cassie," Jake said, hoarsely. "We've got to find her!"

What of T'saer? He should help us, Ax said reasonably.

"Why isn't he here right now? Isn't he suppose to be our little flying watch dog?" Marco added.

"I don't know." Jake went outside. "T'saer!" he called "T'saer, where are you?" The Protector didn't appear.

"Great," Rachel muttered. "Not only is Cassie missing, but now T'saer's gone too."

"There is someone else," Jake muttered.

"Who?"

"That other seraph. What was her name?"

"Lzar-el?" Rachel suggested.

A roar of wing beats were heard. "I am here." Lzar-el folded her wings together. "T'saer and Cassie are missing," she stated.

How did you know? Tobias asked.

"In this realm we are all connected like the lines of time the Ellimists controls," said Lzar-el. "If something happens to one of the Order, we all know soon enough." Jake remembered T'saer saying something like that too.

"So what are we going to do about it?" Rachel asked.

"You shall do nothing. The other seraph are conducting a search throughout the dimension."

"I can't wait here and do nothing!" Jake said.

Lzar-el shook her head. "We cannot afford to lose another one," she said. "The six of you are the most important asset the Order has. Now it is only five, one too many gone."

"Cassie is still out there." Jake confronted the seraph. "You have to let me help."

"She's my best friend," Rachel added. "I won't wait around either."

"That counts for me also."

Me too.

And I also.

Lzar-el looked at the determined five for a long time. A hint of oppressed kindness crossed her face, which she quickly covered up again. Seraph weren't suppose to show concern. "All right," she finally said coldly. "You all shall join in the search." Lzar-el

paused for a moment, sending some kind of mental thought. Four seraphs came at her response.

"Each of you watch over one," Lzar-el advised them. "I will take care of Jake."

The four angels nodded as the group split up.

"What shall I do?" Jake asked.

"You shall come with me while I contact the other branches of the Order. Maybe the higher spirits have seen them." Lzar-el opened her wings. "We shall have to fly to get to the contact station. Do you want me to carry you?"

"No, I can manage on my own." Jake took off his outer clothing, glad that none of the others were around to see him without his morphing suit on. Lzar-el purposely ignored him while Jake morphing into a peregrine falcon. Then the two took to the skies.

At first they soared along the ground, but then with a sudden burst of speed, Lzar-el flew to a higher altitude until she was only a glowing speck in the sky. Jake flapped his own wings, trying to keep up.

Higher and higher he flew; Lzar-el did not seem to be any closer. Jake strained his wings, urging himself to go higher. But peregrine falcons weren't made for such strenuous flying.

For what felt like an eternity, Jake sailed up into the sky. The animal instincts were yelling at him, wanting to dive down for the hunt. Jake easily controlled those, but his gasping lungs and wilting heart were a different matter. He was tiring out with nowhere to go.

Unexpectedly, Jake felt something glide under him. A wind lifted his wings and took him upward. It was almost like a thermal, but went in a certain direction instead of in circles. After that, catching up with Lzar-el was amazingly easy.

Lzar-el had her wings open, letting the current of air guide her too. Above, the lines of time twinkled at them, and Jake soon realized that they were headed straight for them. They came so close to the lines that Jake's wing actually brushed up against them. In that single moment, Jake felt himself a part of every single life in those lines. Every man, woman and child, human or alien, Jake saw each and every part of their lives flash before his eyes in that one moment. Then the moment passed, leaving Jake with a strange omnipotent feeling. He just saw the outcome of a thousand lives in a split second. It didn't make him feel powerful, though: just a guilty feeling of eavesdropping remained.

"Look." Lzar-el gave one more pump of her wings and flew ahead.

Jake looked and saw the contact station. It seemed like a cast cloud of white smoke and sparkle, almost as if it were made of star dust. It probably was.

Landing in this cloud, a sudden thought occurred to him that he should demorph. Surely it had passed two hours already! He did, and

wasn't the least embarrassed to be without his outer clothes. Lzar-el, not being human, didn't seem concerned with those things and that made Jake feel more comfortable.

Lzar-el knelt by a small pool of clear water. Leaning over, she plucked a white feather from her right wing and dipped the tip into the water. In a flash, the water began to ripple and churn as the clear complexion clouded into a dark blue.

"Fifth dimensional Order of Space," she called out in a usual authoritative voice. "This is Lzar-el, head seraph of the fourth dimensional Order of Time. Do you hear me? Please respond."

The water rippled and bubbled, but nothing was heard.

"Fifth dimensional Order of Space," she repeated, "can you hear me?"

Growing rougher, the water bubbled and foamed as if it was on a boiling stovetop. Yet there was no response.

Lzar-el took out the feather, wiped the droplets of water off, then put it back in again. The water grew calm once again, and Lzar-el waited for a few seconds before she started again. She then repeated her call out to the sixth dimensional Order, and the Orders for the seventh, eight and ninth dimensions after that. No one answered her calls.

"How peculiar," she said when she was finished. "What happened to the upper branches of the Order?"

"Isn't there anyone else you could call?" Jake asked.

"No."

Jake was going to ask if she could summon the Ultimate Authority, but decided not to.

Lzar-el gasped, letting the feather fall into the contact pool. Jake cried out at the same time. The _sadness_....

"My friends!" Jake gasped.

"The seraphs!" Lzar-el said at the same time. Then, in a much more pained voice, "Michael."

Chapter 5

Marco ruffled his feathers. Geez, you'd think in the fourth dimension they could afford proper heating.

I know, Rachel added. It's freezing out here all of a sudden.

Marco was an osprey and Rachel was in her eagle morph, while Tobias stayed in his regular red-tailed hawk form. Ax was in his harrier morph. Two seraphs flew ahead and two flew in the back. All had their eyes on the ground, searching for any sign of Cassie or T'saer.

One of the seraphs murmured to the others. "There is a dimensional portal below," one of them said. "On the Northwest Plain."

Then let's go check it out, shall we? Rachel commented and the small group flew down to investigate.

Hey, are those people? Tobias said as they were coming down.

They were. Crowds were gathered around the fiery red hole, screaming and crying out. Coming closer, they could see why.

What is going on here? Marco asked.

The people they saw weren't really people but faint glowing outlines of humans and other creatures. Surrounding them was a dark presence, glowing with black flame. Some tried to escape the mass of beings, but they seemed to be held back by a dark presence surrounding them.

The group flying above could see why the captives would want to flee. One by one, the crowd members were being pulled down into the abyss, a portal ringed with fire and smelling of brimstone. The shouts and yells heard below made all of the children shudder, for it reminded them of the Yeerk pool.

A seraph stopped by one faint man standing a few feet away from the crowd. "What is going on here?" he asked him.

"I don't know!" said the man. "Oh, please, help us, oh help us!" The man tried to grab onto the seraph's clothes but his hands passed straight through.

Ghosts, Tobias realized. They're all ghosts!

What are they doing here? Ax asked.

"Please! Please! I don't want to go!" sobbed the ghost. "I don't deserve this! I was a good person! God, help me!" The black flame seemed to notice the straggler and a snake-like arm reached out to him.

"No!" The ghost flew out of its reach, but the black arm seemed to gesture to it. A vacuum-like force then pulled the man toward the hole leading to the fiery pit. "No! Oh, God, no!!!!" And the man, along with the other ghosts were drawn into the portal and were gone.

Where does that hole lead to? The DMV? The IRS? New Jersey? Marco said, trying a weak joke. He pumped his wings and flew back a few feet. They all did.

One of the seraph shook her head. "No," she said. "It leads to Tartarus."

Tartarus? Tobias repeated.

The seraph turned to him. "Your human term for this is Hell."

"But something is not right," said another of the seraphs. "The crossing to the Perfect World or to Tartarus does not occur here. Where are these souls coming from?"

Another bout of shouting was heard when a second portal opened. A intense bright light came from this one. The Animorphs covered their eyes while the seraphs watched warily. More screams were coming from this one. Ghosts of the dead flowed out of this one, being dragged out of it with the same force that drew them into Tartarus. Ax tentatively flew up to this other portal as close as he could get and peered in.

This seems to me the opposite of the portal to Tartarus, he commented.

The four seraphs looked amazed. "That is not possible!" said the leader. "Why would the souls from the Perfect World be dragged into Tartarus?"

Ax turned his bird head toward them. We should head back and report this- He stopped. What is that?

What's what Ax-man? Tobias asked.

You do not see that black being?

What?

Rachel flapped her eagle wings weakly and fell to the ground. The shade got up and let go of the body. Before, the black mass surrounding the ghost did not harm them. But wisps of this dark cloud now branched out of the mass and formed into individual creature.

Rachel! Tobias yelled.

The shades attacked.

"Draw your swords!" cried the leader. Each seraph carried a silver weapon and drew it to defend their charges. But it was too late.

With unsettling ease, the shadows plunged their hands into the chests of their opponents. The seraphs fell, wings flapping helplessly as they gasped for air. Their swords tried to cut through the shadows but passed through without a mark. These creatures were not demons; if they were, the seraphs would have been able to destroy them. No one knew what they were.

Tobias dive-bombed toward the first one he saw, but passed straight through it. The shade grabbed Tobias in its black hands. He struggled, but soon Tobias fell limp in its grasp.

Demorph! Marco shouted to Ax, as his beak started to disappear.

Ax agreed quickly as two eye stalks popped out of the Harrier's feathers. He swooped down quickly, trying to avoid the shade's wrath.

Marco managed to demorph first, then started to morph into the gorilla. The fur barely started to sprout, however, until a black thing reached into his chest.

Ax concentrated on demorphing. Hurry!

A shade lunged for him, but with awkward movements Ax managed to get out of the way. Blue fur replaced the feathers. Demorph!

Marco, half ape, half human, fell to the ground. A seraph weakly came to his defense before he fell. Two others were dying. A wind blew and the fourth turned to dust.

Ax scrambled up as hooves grew out of the talons. Beak melted into face. Eye stalks sprang up from on top of his head.

Faster! Faster!

Another shade got him from behind, pulling him down. Ax struggled. The tail! Demorph! Where was the tail!?

Finally, the last to form out of the rusty-colored tail feathers, was his own tail emerged, topped with the wicked blade.

One shade was holding Ax down while another headed toward him. He lashed out his tail.

Fwapp!

Fwapp!

Fwapp!

The sweeps of the deadly blade was nothing. It passed through the shade like it was nothing but air.

No! Ax desperately tried again. The shade plunged its icy hand in Ax's chest.

Ax gasped, having the feeling of something taking his breath away. Then the sadness, the horrible feeling welled up inside him. The sadness that caused as his friends to die.

Ax felt his hearts turn cold.....

Chapter 6

Jake and Lzar-el came back down to the endless plain to see someone running up to them.

Ax? Jake called out as he landed in his peregrine falcon morph, then started to demorph.

Prince Jake, Ax told him, We-we were-

We know. Are you the only survivor?

I suppose so, Prince Jake. But before the attack, we had discovered a portal leading to what the seraphs called Tartarus. It seems like the spirits from Heaven are being dragged down into it.

"What?" Lzar-el looked slightly disturbed. "But that's impossible. We must tell G'briel immediately!"

_ Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill_, a voice called. Ax turned around, but saw no one.

"Where is this portal, Ax?" Jake asked him, fully human again.

Well, it is located by what the seraphs called the Northwest Plain by the- he paused as his name echoed out across the plain.

—

_ Aximili, my children had taken you, but you refuse to leave. Now I have come._

"Ax? Ax, are you all right? You kind of zoned out for a second there."

Yes, Prince Jake, Ax replied, shaking off his unsettling feeling. If they couldn't hear the voices, he reasoned, then he must have been imagining things. Do you want me to show you?

Jake looked at Lzar-el. "What attacked you exactly?" she asked.

It-it is hard to describe actually. They are some kind of black spirit, almost like a ghost that lurks on ground-level. They seem to put their hands into your chest and squeeze the life out of you. It's horrible. No weapons can penetrate through them. Our seraphs were destroyed so easily. They are impossible to defeat.

—

Think, Aximili. Did you really survive the attack?

—

"I will transport us there. But if there are any signs of the creatures that attacked your group, Aximili, then I would take us back immediately," Lzar-el reasoned. Then with a flicker of her wings, they were gone.

The next thing they saw was a fiery hole in the sky. There was no evidence of the lost souls, nor was there an appearance of a second portal.

Lzar-el's eyes grew wide. "This is not part of the Prophecy," she murmured.

—

You do not believe in an afterlife, do you, Aximili? You believe in oblivion after death. That is why you won't come with me.

—

Quiet, Ax muttered to it.

"What did you say, Ax?"

Ax blinked. Nothing, Prince Jake.

—
_ Look around you, Aximili. What do you see?_

"Oh God..." Jake gasped. In front of him lay the lifeless bodies of Marco and Tobias. Rachel lay a few yards away, still in her eagle morph.

—
There is a place for you, Aximili. Come with me.

—
Shut up.

—
You will come with me now, Aximili. I am waiting....

—
Go away!

"Ax?" Jake looked at him strangely. "Are you sure you're all right?"

I am fi-

—
I am right behind you.... Look behind you, young Andalite.

—
Go away! Ax suddenly repeated, interrupting himself.

"Aximili, what is wrong?" Lzar-el asked.

—
Look behind you...

—
Ax turned around. LEAVE ME! And then he froze in shock.

"Ax, what it is...?" Jake came toward him, and tried to placed a hand on his shoulder. It passed right through. And then Jake also looked down at the ground in front of him. "Oh. My. God."

No.... Ax was saying. This couldn't be! How could he be here but also...?

—
_ Now come with me, Aximili._

Ax looked up to see what looked like a pale seraph, but with wings of

black ebony.

—

_ I am Azrael, here to take you away, _ he said. The dark spirit held out a hand. _It is your time._

--

Azrael...? Ax looked at him. This couldn't be! Azrael was just a figure in mythology, amazingly existing in both Andalite and human culture. Long ago, he recalled a teacher joking about the possibility of its existence. An Andalite with wings? Impossible! The proportions would be off the scale! But the scholar couldn't possibly guess that such immortal beings be able to choose what form they came in.

The black seraph looked at him with cold eyes. It shouldn't exist! Azrael was just mythology, mere fiction! However, Ax turned away and unconsciously found himself saying the words.

I am the servant of the people, he whispered.

"Ax, what are you doing?"

I am the servant of my Prince.

"Stop it! Ax, stop that right now! That's an order!"

Jake shivered as he said this. Hell, what is going on here... and why is it so damn cold?!

Lzar-el stiffened. "Someone is here." She drew her sword.

I am the servant of honor. My life is not my own when the people have need of it.

Jake looked down at the thing on the ground then back at his friend. Jake approached him again. "Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill!" he shouted through chattering teeth. "I command you to stop this now-"

My life is given for the people, for my Prince and for my honor.

"Stay away!" Jake was suddenly surrounded by white feathers as Lzar-el had him under her wing.

"Aximili, come here immediately!" she ordered. "I am taking us back!"

Ax looked at them with vacant eyes. I can serve you no longer, Prince Jake, he said softly. He reached out as if he was taking someone by the hand and vanished.

"Oh God..." Jake looked around. What Jake thought was Ax was gone, leaving only the thing lying on the ground. Lzar-el viewed her surroundings suspiciously then sheathed her sword.

"I cannot believe it. The Fifth Child had become a ghost," Lzar-el said slowly. "We have go now, Jake."

"But -"

"Aximili had left us now. Whatever spirits got them can now get at us." She flapped her wings uneasily. Suddenly, they too disappeared from the Northwest Plain.

On the ground by the lifeless forms of his friends, lay the corpse of Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill.

Chapter 7

"Ax was... no... but..." Jake looked around to find that they were back in the Seraph quarter, near the white adobes.

"Something very wrong is happening here," Lzar-el repeated, more to herself than to Jake. "We have to call a meeting of the Order of Time immediately!"

"Azrael? But.. I.." Jake couldn't think of anything to say; his mind was jumbled with thoughts. What is happening here? Marco, Tobias, Rachel, Ax... and Cassie- oh God, why Cassie- dead! Flying angels.... walking shadows... Protectors... sadness... Ellimist... Crayak' s tricks.... Death..... What was this all about? Why did he have to be in the middle of it?

"Jake," he heard Lzar-el say. It sounded like she was speaking to him from far away. Why was that?

"Jake!" Lzar-el had her wings around him, shaking his shoulders. "Calm yourself!"

Jake looked up from his thoughts. He realized that she wasn't shaking him; he was the one shivering. "You have to get ready," she was saying to him. "I will take you to the meeting soon."

In a daze, Jake recalled stepping back inside the white houses and changing back into his Sunday clothes, the only clothes he had with him. Then he faintly remembered Lzar-el taking him to the meeting.

The meeting room was a large open-aided forum. The place was built with the style of Greek or Roman architecture, almost like the Coliseum. Jake sat down beside Lzar-el at the front of the forum, head bowed in sad indifference. He remembered many other seraphs there, and the Ellimist too. Six, he thought afterwards, six Ellimists. Six archangels. Wasn't there suppose to be seven?_ Jake thought he heard the angels yelling, shouting.... One of the Ellimist had faded. Michael the archangel was gone, they were saying. But that didn't matter anymore to Jake, nothing mattered anymore.

Jake didn't care. The meeting was passing in a blur before his eyes. Jake could only think of one thing. Cassie, gone. Rachel, gone. Marco, gone. Tobias, gone. Ax, gone. Everybody's gone.... The burden of responsibility that he always had inside him was gone too, leaving an empty shell behind.

A figure stepped into the meeting room, and a hushed descended on them all. Jake raised his head.

"T'saer!" Lzar-el cried, breaking the silence. The Protector looked

up and gave a quick nod in greeting. Jake stared back at him, the dazed look disappearing. If T'saer was here, could Cassie be...?

A unnoticeable look of surprise passed through G'briel's eyes. WHAT HAS BECOME OF YOU? it asked.

"I have come back from the higher dimensions," T'saer said. He sheathed his sword and kneeled in front of the Ellimist. "I was after a dark shade who had one of my charges in its possession, but lost it after a long chase. I tried to enable the help of the upper Orders to send me back to the fourth dimension, but none of the Orders or any of their seraphs could be found. Only now have I returned by traveling through a contact pool." He glanced at Jake, who looked away in response. "I should have come back sooner... I am so sorry, I should have stayed with the others..."

WHAT IS DONE IS DONE, said G'briel. NO DOUBT YOU TRIED YOUR HARDEST TO DEFEND YOUR CHARGES. But everyone could see that he had disappointed the Ellimist again, another failure to add to the list.

"But I have something else to say," said T'saer. "Something wrong is happening throughout the dimensions. The Orders are no longer in existence in the higher regions, and I have also witnessed souls from the Perfect World being forced into Tartarus. I tried to stop them, but they seem to be guarded by more of the black specters."

THE SAME HAS BEEN HAPPENING HERE, said the head Ellimist Uriel.

"So what is to be done?"

The Ellimists were seated in the center of the forum, in a tight circle. In the center of this group was a black object. Jake focused his eyes on it. _A book?_

The archangels conferred for a moment, one flipping through the pages of the book. Each knew the answer already.

G'briel eyed T'saer steadily. NOTHING.

"What?" T'saer jumped up in shock. The seraphs murmured to themselves. "Why nothing?" T'saer cried. "The dimensions are falling apart! The Orders are being eliminated! Innocent souls are being cast into Tartarus! We are the only ones left, and you want us to do _nothing_?"

T'SAER, YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE THESE CATASTROPHES? G'briel explained. THIS IS THE REVELATION, ENDING WITH THE RETURN OF THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY TO THE KNOWN DIMENSIONS. THE APOCALYPSE HAS COME, AND SO WE MUST WAIT UNTIL THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY HAS RETURNED.

"No, this is not the Revelation!" T'saer protested. "Did the Prophecy say for these happenings to occur in the higher dimensions? For Orders to fade?"

IT WAS SAID-

"For damnation to happen to all?" T'saer continued. "No! The Prophecy does not say this! Our higher dimensions are suppose to be free of malice and the innocent spared!"

The Ellimists glared at T'saer. DO YOU DARE QUESTION THE PROPHECY?

"The Prophecy never said for these things to occur." T'saer countered. "Something wicked is destroying us one by one. That is not told in the Prophecy. Do you even know who might be the one behind our destruction?"

The world suddenly went back into focus for Jake. He looked at Lzar-el. "What do they mean 'return?' "

Lzar-el gave Jake a passive glance. "You mortals don't know the real story," she said to him. "The Ultimate Authority left the known dimensions thousands of years ago, saying that he will return after the Revelation. It created the Order to take care of the lower dimensions, including your world, while he was gone. A book of Prophecy was given to us, helping us with all decisions so that they should comply with it." She pointed to the black book the Ellimist had. "We are still waiting for the Ultimate Authority to come back and bring peace to all the dimensions."

"You mean there's no God?"

"The Order takes care of things in the Ultimate Authority's place. But now..." She trailed off, disrupted T'saer's shouting.

"If you can answer that one question," he said, wings flapping back and forth in fury and emotion. "I shall be satisfied! Why are we fading?"

WE CANNOT ANSWER THAT NOW-

"Is there an answer?!" The shout echoed throughout the forum. T'saer glared at the Ellimists before him. "Is there?" A silent moment followed this outburst. Finally a word was said.

"Azrael."

A roomful of faces and wings turned to see Jake, who had spoken.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

"Well, Ax- he... he said something about an Azrael before... before..."

AZRAEL IS THE SPIRIT OF DEATH, Raphael said. HE IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL BEINGS OF ALL THE DIMENSIONS, SECOND ONLY TO THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY. BUT WE ARE MADE TO BE IMMORTAL. WHY WOULD AZRAEL DARE DESTROY AN IMMORTAL?

"Well, the shadows... maybe the shadows have something to do with Azrael," Jake managed to say. Azrael.... Hadn't he heard that name beforehand? Jake tried to remember, but all he could recall was his dead friends, lying on the ground, surrounded by the dust of faded seraphs...

_ Faded seraphs..._ Jake thought, trying to get his thinking straight. _Faded seraphs.... that's it!_

--

"I-I saw a shadow near the seraph Synl-Oni before she faded," Jake said. "It proclaimed something about for Azrael."

"Azrael is the bringer of death," T'saer reasoned. "Could he had made the shadows to destroy us?"

IF HE DID DO SO, THEN WHY? Uriel asked skeptically.

"Azrael works under a contract with the Ultimate Authority," Lzar-el said. "When the Ultimate Authority left, it sent Azrael to work with us. The only reason Azrael would break this contract was if the Ultimate Authority came back."

WHY WOULD THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY WANT TO DESTROY US THEN? questioned G'briel.

"Maybe the Ultimate Authority didn't come back," Jake said slowly. "Maybe someone else took its place. Something so powerful that even Azrael obeys it."

IMPOSSIBLE! cried one of the other Ellimists. ONLY ONE WHO HAS CONTROL OF THE PERFECT WORLD HAS CONTROL OF AZRAEL! WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE PERFECT WORLD?

"We all know who could have done such a thing," T'saer said. "The Crayak. Have you not considered that this was possible? The Crayak _is_ stronger than us, held back by only the rules of the game."

WE _HAVE_ THOUGHT THIS AS POSSIBLE, G'briel said. IT WOULD BE THE WORSE CATASTROPHE IF THAT HAPPENED. The Ellimists exchanged glances at this point.

"Then are we going to do anything about it now?" T'saer asked.

NO. SINCE THE CRAYAK IS PURE EVIL ITSELF, THEN IT IS SURE SIGN OF THE REVELATION. NOW ALL THE ORDER HAS TO DO IS WAIT FOR THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY TO RETURN.

"You will let the Crayak rule over us all?!" T'saer roared.

IT IS PART OF THE REVELATION. THE PROPHECY SAID THAT THE WORLDS WILL CRUMBLE AND THAT THE SPIRITS COULD FALL. BUT IF YOU HAVE FAITH, THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY WILL COME.

"You are wrong!" T'saer turned to the seraphic audience behind him. "Listen to me, my people! The Prophecy said that evil will come to the lower dimensions, not here! If evil comes to rule us all, there will be no hope left even when the Ultimate Authority does come back! We have to go to the Perfect World and de-throne the Crayak from his unlawful place in the heavens!"

Pointing to Jake, he continued. "Five of the six children we created are gone, but one is still left. He was born with the power to destroy the Crayak. With him, we shall win!"

YOU ARE NOT TO VIOLATE THE PROPHECY! Uriel shouted, its voice rumbling with rage. WE CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO DO THIS!

"This is not the Prophecy! The Ellimists had interpreted it incorrectly! We are not experiencing the Apocalypse and never were! The Crayak has tricked us with our own beliefs to take an advantage in the game! We must fight back or be crushed!"

The Ellimists stood up, towering over the one seraph.

YOU WERE ALWAYS THE REBELLIOUS ONE, thundered Raphael angrily, WITH THAT WICKED COMPASSION YOU POSSESS. BUT IT HAS GONE TOO FAR. NO ONE QUESTIONS THE PROPHECY! YOU SHALL STOP THIS NONSENSE NOW! FOR IF YOU DISOBEY THE ORDER, YOU WILL BE STRIPPED OF YOUR WINGS AND CAST AWAY AS ONE OF THE FALLEN!

The forum suddenly became quiet at this threat. But T'saer seemed to ignore it.

T'saer gave the Ellimists barely a glance. He said to the seraphs in front of him, "Questioning was never evil, and neither is compassion. I only state the truth of the matter. We may be part of the Order, but we are also individuals, able to think for ourselves. I don't have to follow what I think is wrong, and the same is with any of you. Now tell me, are any of you with me, or are you all against me?"

The Ellimists panicked at the thought of the lesser spirits thinking for themselves. This was the Order, a system where everyone was connected as One. That was how the Ultimate Authority created it to be, and it shall remain that way.

THAT IS IT! bellowed G'briel. YOU ARE A DISGRACE TO THE ORDER! T'SAER, KIN TO LUCIFER, LEAVE THIS PLACE AT ONCE!

T'saer looked at his fellow seraphs. None stepped forward to help him. None were concerned with what T'saer said; they were followers of the Order.

"Very well," T'saer said softly. "I shall have to accomplish this on my own."

He opened his wings and jumped into the air. All was quiet as the Protector took flight from the forum. His steady wing beats were the only noise that interrupted the silence.

When the rebel seraph was gone from view, the Ellimists looked at one another solemnly. Uriel sighed and muttered something under its breath.

Then wing beats stopped.

Silence.

Jake looked out behind him at the main entrance. Through the opening, he saw an angel fall to the ground below. He shut his eyes so he wouldn't see T'saer land. But he could not block his ears well enough._ _

_ Thump._

The sound echoed in the stillness. A few seraphs looked in the same direction where the falling took place, but then turned away carelessly. T'saer had fallen; he did not concern them anymore. That was the way of the Order; do not interfere and always follow the Prophecy. As the saying goes, "I am we and we are I." That was every seraph's motto.

G'briel turned to Jake. I SHALL TAKE HIS PLACE AS YOUR PROTECTOR NOW.

Chapter 8

The meeting had ended soon after T'saer had fallen. Lzar-el shook her head. "He was just a young one," she said. "But his views did seem correct. Do you believe T'saer was right?" Jake saw a sudden spark of feeling cross her face, one of the few he saw in a seraph other than T'saer. But then the spark faded and the passive mask covered her face again. Jake didn't answer.

Later, Jake stood outside in his place at the Seraph quarter looking at the lines above. G'briel was close by. Jake couldn't see it, but knew that the Ellimist was watching him.

Lzar-el appeared in front of Jake. "G'briel," she addressed, "The fallen seraph has been spotted in this quarter. He is still trying to persuade others to join his cause."

BUT HE HAS BEEN BANISHED FROM THE ORDER. T'SAER IS NOT ALLOWED TO REMAIN HERE. TELL RAPHAEL TO DISPOSE OF HIM.
> "He claims to be in league with the Crayak."<p>

G'briel stiffened and his voice soon hardened. THIS WILL BE TAKEN CARE OF PERSONALLY THEN. WHERE IS THE REBEL?

"In the Southwest Landscape."

WATCH THE CHILD. I WILL RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

When the Ellimist left, the seraph turned to Jake.

"Did he really?" Jake gasped.

Lzar-el looked away. A reminisce of emotion once again was seen in her face. "I will be expelled from the Order for lying to an Ellimist," she said sorrowfully. "However, since I believe T'saer is right, I would have fallen soon enough. Come. We have to meet T'saer right away."

"Where are we- ahh!"

The last part of the sentence was uttered when Lzar-el picked Jake up in her arms and took to the air. "To the contact station," she said.

The trip was much faster with Lzar-el carrying him than it was on his own. Flying under the lines of time, Jake saw unicorns racing on the ground below. With their silvery manes blowing in the wind, the

unicorns, one-by-one, leaped into the air. A hole in the sky appeared before them, and soon the whole herd leaped through.

Lzar-el looked down also. "The unicorns sense that something is wrong and fled to the unknown dimensions," she explained. "However, we cannot travel that way so easily. And since magical unicorns can never be trusted, the only way for you to travel to the Perfect World is by the contact pool."

"What?"

"You'll see."

Soon the two landed in the cloud of star dust that was the contact station. Someone was already there.

"T'saer..." Jake trailed off, then turned his eyes away from the former Protector.

He still looked the same, more or less. The warm radiance was gone from inside him, leaving a barren feeling in its place. Dark circles appeared under his eyes and he looked strangely pale. His dark hair had streaks of gray in it and his face looked older and more worn than any other seraph Jake had seen before.

T'saer still had his wings, but they weren't the splendid white feathered limbs that he had before. The feathers that were once pale and glossy now had dark splotches of black and brown on them. Whenever the fallen seraph moved, a tarred feather would fall off of those ruined wings and crumble into dust. Jake turned away in disgust because the once beautiful wings were now rotting away right before his eyes.

"Do you believe me, Jake?" T'saer asked weakly.

"I-I don't know." Jake couldn't look at his former protector in the eye anymore without seeing how horrible he had become.

"You have to," T'saer said softly. "Together, Jake, we can destroy the Crayak. That is why the Order put such great lengths to protect you and your friends from the shadows of Azrael. Each had a special quality that could change all the dimensions forever, but you... you-the First Child- have the most important one of all. However, if you don't believe me, we cannot win. Faith is the core of everything we do in this world." One of T'saer's spoiled feathers dropped at Jake's feet and crumbled into dust. "I must know. What be your faith, Jake? In me or in the Order?"

Jake hesitated and kept his eyes to the ground. "I'm sorry..." he stuttered. "I-I don't know. Everything's just so confusing..."

T'saer nodded. "I understand. Lzar-el, take him back. He does not believe."

Lzar-el scooped Jake up in her arms. "Wait!" he cried. T'saer looked at him.

"I'll do it," Jake said.

"But you do not believe-"

"I believe that I can destroy the Crayak if I had the chance," Jake interrupted. "I'm not sure if I believe that what is happening is the Apocalypse or not, but I do believe in myself. A friend once said to me that believing in yourself can be as powerful as any belief in a god. I know I'm willing to put faith in that."

T'saer smiled, an action which seemed make better of his appearance.

"Then it is off to the Perfect World," he said. He gestured to the contact pool. "Shall we?"

Chapter 9

"We're suppose to go to the Perfect World through that?" Jake looked at the small pool. Not only was it quite small, but it was shallow also, barely a foot deep. Through the clear water, Jake could see the stone bottom.

"Of course," Lzar-el said. "Only the highest of the Order ever get to see the Perfect World, but I might be able to make a portal for us by rearranging the lines of time... and with your help." She put her hands into the water. To Jake's amazement, her hands went through the stone bottom and seemed to be pulling against invisible wires underneath.

"There could be some complications involved with this," T'saer said. "I almost didn't make it last time I traveled."

"But I am the head seraph of this dimension and have more experience in dimension-traveling," Lzar-el said lightly. "If I get the connections right..." She tugged at an invisible wire. "Jake come here, I needed your help. Put you hand through."

Jake did and as soon as his hand touched the water, an almost electric-like shock went through him. He gasped and jerked his hand out of the water.

"Shouldn't you ask T'saer instead?"

"T'saer is one of the fallen," Lzar-el quickly said, like that statement said it all. T'saer looked away at the comment. "You are one of the Children. Only you will be able to open the gate."

"Oh." Jake tried again, steeled for the shock this time. The fierce impact startled him, but not too much.

"Close your eyes."

Jake did.

"What do you see?"

"Nothing."

"That is because you are too tense. Relax."

Letting go of the tension inside, Jake saw images appear before him.

The boy suddenly felt the strangest sensation of flying, even though he knew his feet were still on the ground. "I-I see colors. Blue... white, lots of white..."

"Good. Now you should see a line. Do you?"

"Yeah..." He sighed, teetering on the brink of unconsciousness. Everything Jake saw in his blindness was soft and faint, with that same floating feeling all the way through. It was different than the emotional numbness he felt before, or the sheer fear before that. Jake liked this peace.

"Follow it, and open the gate."

In Jake's mind, a swirling ribbon of gold beckoned to him, and he felt a need to follow its shining path. Rising higher, Jake felt the sense of flight without wings and soon came to something large and towering. A gate seemingly made of pure ivory stood up in front of him.

"Open the gate...." Lzar-el's voice echoed in the tunnel.

Jake reached out and brushed his hand against the smooth surface. His touch seemed to have some immense power, and the mighty gate swung ajar.

Suddenly, Jake felt himself being pushed. Not a forceful one, but a soft gentle tug like that of an ocean wave pulling against the shore. Like a swimmer of the sea, Jake rode on the soft wave of peaceful comforts and heavenly wishes and stepped past the gates. There was no substance past them, and the child felt himself falling into another world.....

Chapter 10

A burst of light rushed out from the contact pool as the child fell in. The fallen angel and his holy counterpart covered their eyes against the intense glare. A loud whistling sound of escaping air pieced the atmosphere around them. "Hurry," cried Lzar-el. "Go through. I will follow."

T'saer looked down into the light. One of his black feathers drifted down and turned into dust before touching the silvery portal. "I can't," he whispered, a sudden fear entering his heart. "The heavens eject the fallen at their gates. I wouldn't make it."

"Jake will get you through," Lzar-el said. "He is one of the Children."

HE WILL NOT!

"G'briel!" The seraphs flapped their wings against the sharp gusts.

THE FIRST CHILD WILL NOT BE LOST TO YOUR FOOLISHNESS! The Ellimist thundered as he appeared at the contact station.

"The First Child will not be lost to your ignorance," Lzar-el shot back icily.

"Jump!" T'saer gasped to her. And with a bound so swift that it can only be seen by an immortal eye, the two leaped into the light.

NO! G'briel thundered but already its voice echoed far away. The portal closed almost instantly.

Lzar-el felt a natural wave buoying her along as she flew down the tunnel, following the golden ribbon. With another pump from her wings, she flew faster.

A tremor rippled throughout the tunnel; it was almost an expression of disgust. Lzar-el felt the sharp vibration of revulsion and the white seraph looked behind her. Struggling with his broken wings, T'saer was being pulled back. He opened his mouth to cry out, but no sound came. The tunnel, revolted by the presence of the demon, was ejecting him.

Flying to his side, Lzar-el tried to pull him along with her. But as soon as their hands touched both felt the sudden pain from their companion. T'saer felt the shock of purity, of innocence, of the light that he once had within him. Lzar-el experienced the utter unconfined knowledge that crushed her innocence and destroyed her purity by its truth. For the first time in her immortal life, Lzar-el became truly aware of things, of places, of people and their problems and frustrations. She felt their worry and their pain. She suddenly cared and the seed of rebellion within her bloomed.

Lzar-el had felt T'saer's compassion and her passive mask disappeared.

Lzar-el had fallen.

T'saer stared wide-eyed. "Lzar-el..." His grip upon her hands tightened, but not fiercely.

"G'briel will come after us!" she interrupted, suddenly talking with more feeling. "We must go!" Lzar-el didn't notice how old her voice sounded. "My wings won't fly much longer." Her gray eyes looked at him and he silently nodded. Together, the two made their way to the light.

The tunnel groaned and shook. The light ahead faded, and began to darken. But a warm wind from Heaven came and beckoned them further.

Both had never felt so much difficulty in their entire lives. As white seraphs, they always had the power to master hurdles. The will of the Paradise made it so. Now that same will was pushing at them with all its strength. The dark seraphs struggled with their own strength for the first time in their entire lives.

"Jake!" T'saer gasped. They were so close to the gates now. "Come, Child!"

The tunnel pulled them back. A subtle ripping sound was heard and T'saer screamed. Lzar-el looked and paled. A wing was being torn off his backside. Lzar-el grabbed a firmer hold around her friend tried desperately to move forward. It was then she looked down at her hands and saw how wrinkled and they had become. She groaned; the joints in her hands ached with every pull. "Jake," she shouted. "where are

you?!"

Beyond the pearly gates, a small figure stood up. Jake looked around. The calm was overpowering, almost intoxicating. And the color! Jake had gotten used to the black, featureless world of the dimension of Time, and the Perfect World was a total opposite to it. The bright green grass flourished and grew up to his waist, with flowers of every color of the rainbow blooming around him. The endless sky of blue spanned the horizon, a blue so crystal clear that it was like looking through diamonds.

Jake breathed in deeply. The peace was making him sort of drowsy. He laid down on the green, green grass and put his hands behind his head. Contentment enveloped him.

He heard someone screaming his name. Oh, what the bother, Jake was so happy now. Why so he pay any attention to the voice? Jake would have liked to just lie down and stare at the endless blue rather get up. Maybe he would never get up again.

Then he heard someone call to him again. Jake sighed.

He rolled upon his stomach and stared intently at a white rabbit as it hopped right in front of him. The rabbit turned its head and looked at Jake, unafraid. Jake smiled. _How weird_, he thought, _that I never noticed how great it is just to sit on the grass and have a rabbit sit on the grass with you. How peaceful it is sitting here while a rabbit watched you! _

--

"Jake, where are you?!" someone screamed.

"Right here," _Jake replied dully, watching the rabbit. The feeling Jake had was so wonderful... something like pure bliss.

"JAKE!!!"

The boy shook his head. Why was that person yelling at him all of a sudden? Jake knew that he hadn't done anything wrong. _Better just ignore her_, Jake thought_. I don't have to put up with people yelling at me all the time._ But a tiny feeling in the back of his mind told him that he had something very important to do. Something about waiting at the gates... Wait. What gates? Jake searched his brain for the thing he had forgotten. He blinked. Yes, he did have to do something about the gates. What was it again? Wasn't he suppose to wait for someone there?

Jake got up and saw the towering gates of white. Oh, those gates! Jake strolled up to them and looked out.

He saw two seraphs frantically trying to enter. It looked like something was blowing them just out of the entrance's reach.

Jake thought they seemed familiar.

"T'saer! Lzar-el!" he cried in sudden remembrance. He reached out and grabbed their hands just in time.

The two fallen angels tumbled on the grass. Both were breathless and exhausted. T'saer winced as he gingerly touched his spotted left wing. It was half ripped out of its socket.

"Why didn't you help us sooner?" Lzar-el asked with hard gray eyes.

"I don't know," Jake said. "I just forgot about you guys for a moment. Isn't it so nice here?" He laid back down onto the grass.

"It is the Perfect World affecting you," T'saer said. He got up stiffly. Lzar-el rushed to his side and carefully supported the ripped wing. "Don't worry," he said sadly to her. "It'll fall off soon." Lzar-el backed away at this statement. A feather fell from her wings. It was slightly black at the edges.

"Oh really?" Jake sighed. "I haven't noticed. Did you see that rabbit over there?"

Lzar-el got up stiffly. Jake looked at her. "You look different," he said.

The lady demon looked at him as she brushed a lock of snow-white hair from her face. "Knowledge can age a soul. Makes them grow old and sick and die. It happened to the first man and woman. I never knew it could happen to us."

"Jake, come here," T'saer said civilly.

"What?"

As soon as the child got close enough, the former Protector whacked him across the face. Stunned, Jake fell to the ground. He put his hand to his cheek, and looked around. The sleepy aura that he felt before disappeared. "Why'd you do that for?" he demanded sharply.

"The force of the Perfect World was acting upon you." T'saer answered simply. "You must not succumb to its peace at all costs."

Jake touched his bruised cheek and realized how foolish he was acting just moments before. The fallen angel looked away, but Jake had a feeling T'saer had gotten a bit of satisfaction from that bit of violence. After all, Jake almost let them be destroyed out there.

"I have never been to this dimension before," Lzar-el said, "but to my best knowledge, the throne of the Ultimate Authority should be due north."

"How far north do we have to go?" Jake asked.

"I do not know."

"Well," Jake surveyed his surroundings. "Let's get started."

Chapter 11

The constant sunlight shone upon the three as they walked through

Paradise. The green grass sparkled with dew that never dried. From afar, trees three feet in diameter could be seen raising their branches to toward the sky.

Jake had to pinch himself occasionally to prevent him from lapsing into the world's harmony. When they were heading toward a grove of those mighty trees, Jake pinched himself twice and looked ahead once more. Someone was there. Could it be....?

His heart leaped. "Cassie!" he cried. He ran faster.

"Don't!" Lzar-el shouted but Jake was too far ahead to hear her.

He ran to a giant oak and peered around its trunk. Cassie was sitting by the tree, staring up at the sky.

"Cassie?"

Cassie turned and looked at him, smiling.

"I can't believe you're here," he told her. He also wanted to say how worried he had been and how scared and how much he had missed her, but he found that he couldn't say that. For some reason, Jake always gotten shy when he wanted to tell Cassie these things.

She turned to him and blinked her dark brown eyes. "Why hello there," she said airily. "Who are you?"

"What do you mean?" He sat down next to her. Cassie smiled back blandly. "I'm Jake. Don't you remember?"

Cassie leaned back against the trunk and sighed. She seemed to have ignored what he said. Her eyes drifted upwards. "Doesn't the sky look so beautiful when the sunlight is shining through it like that? I could stare up at the sky forever; it's so beautiful."

"Cassie," Jake said. "Do you know where the others are? Do you remember anything at all?"

"And the sky is just the most perfect shade of blue," Cassie whispered. Her gaze looked down at Jake again. "What did you say again?"

"I asked if you knew where the others were."

"Others?"

"You know. Rachel, Marco, Tobias and Ax. Have you seen them?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Cassie looked up again. "Oh look! A bird!"

Jake looked up to, hoping it was Tobias. It wasn't.

"You know, you haven't told me who you are yet," Cassie commented.

"I did. I'm Jake."

Cassie gave a quizzical look at him then smiled again. "Nice to meet

you, Jake."

"But we already know each other."

Cassie was looking up again. "We do?" she said offhandedly. "I have never seen you before in my life. There goes the bird..."

Jake felt a little tug at his heart. It hurt him when she said that, for some reason unknown to him. It burned into his heart and made him frightened. "Cassie, we do know each other." He held her hands in his. "Please tell me that you know me. Just remember. Look at me."

"But the sky is so interesting..."

"Look at me." Jake looked into her eyes desperately for some sign of recognition. She had to remember him!

Cassie gave him a cold stare and took her hands out from his. "I don't think you're very nice," she said stiffly. She rose to her feet. "I'll be leaving now." Then she turned around and started to walk away.

"Wait Cassie!"

She stopped and turned around. Jake was kneeling on the grass in front of her. A moment of silence came between them.

Then she spoke. "How do you know my name?" she asked in an aloof manner. "I don't even know yours. Just leave me alone." And she walked away.

Jake just sat there, surprised and hurt. "It's Jake," he said softly. "Why can't you remember?"

He wanted to run after her. He wanted to go and tell her how important it was for her to remember him. But he didn't move and Cassie walked around a bend in the woods and was gone.

The two dark seraphs approached him. Jake was still kneeling, staring at where Cassie disappeared from view.

"Cassie couldn't even remember my name," he said slowly. He suddenly fell back onto the grass like all of his strength had left him.

"I told you not to see her," Lzar-el whispered. She felt sadness for Jake and expected it but she didn't know why. He hadn't been physically hurt. T'saer exchanged glances with her. He felt pity too.

"This is Paradise," T'saer said. "But in Paradise there can't be love for its inhabitants. For if love exists, then there could also be a possibility that it can be broken and unhappiness to occur. There cannot be unhappiness in the Perfect World, so there can be no love."

"Then how can this be Heaven?" Jake asked.

"In the Perfect World there can only be peace," said Lzar-el. "Deep, spiritual peace. In order for that to occur, memories of the past

must be erased, along with all emotion. Ignorance is bliss, Jake. You should know that; you just experienced it."

The boy felt sudden hatred for the Perfect World, which was not really perfect after all. Jake got up abruptly. "Come on," he said quickly, marching out of the forest. If any of his other friends were here, he didn't want to see them.

Chapter 12

After walking across Paradise for hours, Lzar-el stopped. "We're close," she said. The other two stopped.

"How can you tell?" Jake asked.

"Look up."

The sky above was glowing brightly, almost like it was white instead of blue. Jake hadn't noticed before, probably because he had refused to look up at the sky after his encounter with Cassie.

"We must be extremely careful now," Lzar-el said. "Who knows what guards the throne of the Perfect World."

A line of brown flecked with green sat on the horizon. "The eastern wall of the Garden," T'saer whispered in awe. "I thought I would never have a chance to enter the Garden."

"Inside the Garden is where the throne is," Lzar-el explained. "There should be an weak spot in the eastern wall where the first humans were ejected."

Suddenly a howl echoed through the air. Jake looked up. "Duck!" cried T'saer, pushing him to the ground.

The creature cast its five-yard long shadow over them as it swooped down. The thing roared again as it missed and the flew higher. Its two serpentine heads hissed at him as it beat its three pairs of wings away from them, ready to make another attack. With the heads of snakes, body of a lion, whip-like tails and bat wings, this monster looked formidable indeed.

"Cherubim, guardians of the throne!" Lzar-el gasped and drew her sword. She crawled toward the other two. "We must make a run for it!" she hissed to them.

"ROARRRRRR!"

"T'saer, go!"

The giant winged beast swooped down again. Lzar-el's silver sword flashed and the cherubim howled in pain. It lost its balance and plowed into the ground, sending upturned soil and grass everywhere.

T'saer threw Jake over his shoulder and ran straight to the eastern wall.

"ROOOOAAAAARRRRR!!" cried the fallen cherubim. At its call two more beasts jumped over the eastern wall and attacked.

Jake was dumped hastily on the ground and T'saer unsheathed his sword. The first of the back-up dived and T'saer swung his sword. One of the heads were chopped clean off.

"Look out!" Lzar-el warned.

T'saer turned to see a second cherubim flying at him.

"No!" Lzar-el charged at the flying beast as it picked up the dark seraph by the left wing. She jumped and plunged the sword deep into its left loin, but the cherubim's spiked tail lashed out and she lost grip on her sword. Lzar-el fell to the ground. She vaulted up to her feet. "Jake?"

A tiger glared back at her with yellow eyes. I'm going after him, Jake said. He bounded away.

"Child, no!" A hiss was heard and Lzar-el struck at the injured cherubim behind her before it could attack. Pulling her sword out of the beast, she slashed one last time. It sputtered and died. Lzar-el ran after the tiger, leaving a trail of feathers behind her.

Chopping recklessly with his weapon, T'saer tried to hack through the talons that held him. The second snake head snapped at him and dug its claws into his wing.

The remaining one-headed cherubim flew slightly underneath them. Dark blood flowed from where its second head was cut off, but it didn't mind that. The cherubim opened its mouth. Sharp fangs glistened in its mouth as it licked its jaws. The cherubim holding T'saer hissed once then let go.

"Ahhhh!"

The other cherub caught him with its jaws by the wings. T'saer slashed once.

Riiiiipppp!

A flurry of torn feathers blew to the ground. The black angel screamed once he cut off of what was left of his wings. The wingless being fell...

... and landed on the back of a tiger.

"Umph!" T'saer groaned and grew limp.

Are you okay? Jake stopped. Then the two cherubim above spotted him and dive bombed at the same time.

With one gigantic bound, Jake leaped up and out of the way. Their target lost, the cherubim tried to stop their lunge in mid-air and steer the other way. One cherubim crashed into the other as both hit the ground. Neither of them moved afterwards.

Lzar-el caught up with Jake. "T'saer!" She rushed up and put her hands on his torn backside. Two black stubs stuck out of his shoulder blades. Oily, thick blood covered his back, but that was from the

cherubim, not himself. Spirits don't bleed, only fade.

Get on. Lzar-el did, holding the unconscious seraph in her arms. Jake checked to make sure she was holding on tight, then he headed toward the Garden at swift pace.

Chapter 13

The eastern wall of the Garden was covered in flourishing ivy. Bright flowers bloomed among the green vines, giving off a wonderful scent. The leaves swayed back and forth as an unknown wind blew by the stone wall.

However, there was one section where no ivy grew. A square portion nine feet by nine feet stood without any botanical adornment. The stones were not a light gray like the others, but were made of dark obsidian, as if something cursed had touched them. _This must be the place where Adam and Eve were thrown out,_ Jake thought.

We're here.

Lzar-el got T'saer and herself off Jake's back, then he demorphed. Jake dropped the rolled up pile of clothes he had been carrying in his tiger mouth and changed. His Sunday clothes has become torn and dirty in his travels. But mending them was a thought that was furthest from his mind. Jake didn't even know if he'll ever get home to mend them.

Lzar-el handed him T'saer's sword. "You'll need this," she said.

Jake took the weapon carefully in his hands. A golden sheen reflected off the silver sword. He had never used a sword before in his life, but he could tell that it was light, keen, and perfectly balanced.

"I'm suppose to destroy the Crayak using this?" he asked. Remembering the Crayak the last time they had met, Jake envisioned the being on his mountainous steel throne. Metal and machinery had made up most of his blood red body. The boy still shivered with the thought of that evil eye staring down at him. Compared to the Crayak and his powers, even a sword as beautifully crafted as this one seemed like nothing. After this long journey, Jake was finally facing the challenge he wanted to face. Now he wasn't so sure that he believed in himself as greatly as he did before.

Lzar-el seemed to be reading his exact thoughts. "T'saer believes that you have the power to defeat the Crayak even without a weapon," she said. "Whatever your power is, Jake, it is inside you. Have faith and use it." She looked at the black wall and touched the glass surface with an ancient hand.

Jake went up to it and did the same. However, at his touch, the blocks shuddered and caved in, revealing darkness inside. Without a moment's hesitation, Jake stepped into the Garden.

The light shone brighter than before; Jake had to shield he eyes from the intensity. Wild birdcalls and animal noises were heard everywhere among the various tress and shrubs. It seemed like some kind of wild rain forest with every plant, animal and mineral gathered in one

place. The air was infatuated with the strong perfumes of a million kinds of flowers. Odd trees grew right next to each other; the mangrove and pine coexisting together while oak mingled with cocoa. In the thick, humid air, birds of every color swooped from branch to branch in this dense jungle. Jake jumped; a jaguar had slinked across his path. A young doe followed it without fear. Through the trees, Jake could see lions and ewes resting together; the cubs playing with the lambs.

Walking through the Garden, Jake even saw creatures not from his world, or even from his dimension. Large five-legged creatures with purple spots were grazing together while a tiny dog-like creature ran underneath their legs. Misty orange forms floated through the air and when Jake walked through them, he had the unsettling feeling that they were reading his mind. Butterflies with wings the size of dinner plates hovered in the air in front of him, but when Jake waved a hand to shoo them away, they grew into miniature kangaroos which hopped away in gigantic leaps.

Soon the rain forest thinned out as a plain of sandy-green grass took it's place. Jake didn't want to expose himself out in the open so he stayed within the forest, but kept the grasslands within view.

"Never thought we'd meet in Paradise." a voice sneered from behind him. "A world so perfect, yet as cold as ice..."

Jake whirled around and pointed the sword at his opponent. "Drode," he spat.

The lizard-like creature smirked. "So, Fearless Leader, seen your love? Enjoy your experience in this land above?"

Jake wanted to say a nasty comeback, but Drode went on. "I can't believe you want to face the Crayak," he was saying, "An all-powerful monstrosity against a mere boy? No matter, might as well start your attack." Drode snapped his webby fingers and suddenly their surroundings changed. They were still in the Garden; in the middle of the grasslands in fact, but now Jake stood in front of the Crayak himself.

HELLO JAKE, it said. YOU HAVE COME TO CHALLENGE ME? The red eye focused on the boy and seemed to drill a hole into the back of his head.

"Yes, I have." Jake stood in the best fighting stance he could muster, and raised his sword out in front of him.

The Crayak seemed to laugh at this pathetic move. It twitched a mechanical hand, and Jake was bodily thrown twenty feet in the air before falling to the ground. His sword flew out of his grasp and landed a few yards away.

YOU AMUSE ME, the Crayak chuckled and made another hand gesture. Jake was lifted off the ground and dropped again like a rag doll. He gasped and scrambled to his feet, only to be swept away and dropped again.

Jake gasped for breath and he got up onto his hands and knees. Taunting laughter filled the air. Jake didn't know what sparked it;

was it that cruel laugh or the anger that was welling up inside him? Crawling to reach his sword, Jake nevertheless felt something bubble up inside him. Something deep and strong and powerful just burst inside his chest. The powerful strength then flowed throughout his body, sweeping into his legs, his feet, up his arms and into his fingertips. Then Jake just grabbed that silver sword, turned, and let that strength go.

There was no sound nor was there any visible reference indicating where this force came from exactly. Yet as soon as Jake turned and released it, the power just flew from his hands, down the sword and zoomed straight at the Crayak.

Something hot and white flew from the sword and shot at the Crayak head on. It screamed in pain and then it knew that Jake was more than just a mere mortal. The Crayak shot a hand out and Jake was thrown another few dozen feet. He was prepared for this and the boy aimed another flash of white light at the Crayak. Even from a hundred yards away, the bolt of lightening flew true and struck its mark. That was when the duel really turned deadly.

The Crayak shot a bolt of red fire at the boy. Jake scrambled away just in time. The red flame burst at his heels. He jumped up and then rolled on the ground from the impact. The Crayak struck again, this time making his mark. Jake screamed, and when he looked down he saw that his leg was completely torn open, revealing the bloody bone and ripped muscle.

The boy hobbled, got a grip on his sword and fired another bolt of light. It missed, and the Crayak stuck again. Jake barely dodged it, lost his balance and tripped. A sickening crunch was heard. His injured leg was now broken.

Jake tried to ignore the pain escalating up his leg and shooting up his spine. Using his sword as a crutch, he leaned against it, and looked up at the Crayak. He could just tell that he and the Drode were just playing with him, and the Crayak hadn't even showed a fraction of what it could really do.

He had to do something! Jake would not let anyone crush him down. The power from within him had grown stronger since he triggered it. Jake felt its glow and energy. But his broken leg distracted him from doing anything. All he could do was stand there, hunched over, a hand clutched over broken limb. Blood seeped through his fingers.

"Is that what you call fighting skill?" the Drode called jeeringly behind him. "My master might as well go for the kill!" Jake ignored him, but what the Crayak's underling said next sent him over the edge. "Is it something other than that leg which makes you sore? Maybe it's because Cassie doesn't care for you anymore..."

A flash of pain and rage shown in Jake's eyes. "SHUT UP!!" he screamed. Without realizing it, he suddenly was in Drode's face and gave him a swift uppercut to the reptilian jaw. Jake didn't know how he could move so fast, especially with a broken leg, but he did.

Stunned with the surprise swing, the Drode fell back. Jake became a raging maniac, sending quick jabs to the Drode's face while leaning on the sword. "Damn you, damn you, damn you!!" he hissed savagely.

The Drode feebly tried to defend himself from the blows. "Master, Master!" he yelled.

Jake felt a burst of fire red energy blast him head over heels from behind. The Drode got up and scampered out of Jake's range. Turning around, Jake faced another bolt of electricity, which hit him straight on, paralyzing him to the ground.

Pain shot up his spine as Jake tried to get up again. The Crayak chuckled again, and stared at him. MISERABLE WEAKLING, it said. HOW COULD YOU EVER THINK THAT YOU COULD DEFEAT ME? I AM THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY!

Horrible despair washed over Jake as his leg throbbed in agony. His head was spinning and the multitude of shocks has severely weakened him. He looked up to see a fuzz image of three Droles standing over him in triumph. _But I can't give up!_ he thought. _I can do it... the seraphs said...._

Drode strolled over to where Jake lay. "You think your little angel friends can help you?" he scoffed. The Drode gave a sharp kick at Jake's injured side and he groaned. Drode smiled wickedly. "Oh, Azrael," he called. "The angel of death has got them too...."

His name uttered, the seraph with black wings appeared at their side. Its gray, ashen face peered at Jake coldly.

"I believe that you have found," Drode asked it, "A couple more intruders sneaking around?"

"No...." Jake tried to stand, but Drode gave another sharp kick. Then the devil's advocate lifted his foot and stomped it upon Jake's free hand. The boy screamed as his bones crushed.

Azrael nodded stiffly. _I have_, it said, its voice just a deadly whisper. Azrael paused as he sent out a mental thought, and two shadows emerged, each dragging something behind them.

Jake gasped. _No, they can't be dead, they can't!_ he thought. _Spirits don't die; they fade. Oh please, they aren't dead!_

--

"Azrael can extinguish their petty existence at no cost," Drode said, pointing to the two limp forms of T'saer and Lzar-el. "Give up, boy, all is lost."

The Crayak paused. BUT THERE IS ONE ALTERNATIVE....

"Ah, yes," Drode said. He looked at Jake and kicked the sword from its weak hold. "Think you can win with this little knife? Ha!" He picked it up and threw it off to the side. "If you surrender yourself to my master, he'll spare your pitiful life. Proclaim your faith to the true Ultimate Authority and he'll let you and your friends live here in the Perfect World for all eternity. But if you refuse...well..." Drode stepped harder on Jake's broken hand. He winced in agony. The last line came out a dark whisper. "You and everyone you care about will be sent to Hell." Drode grinned cruelly

at the thought. "Paradise or Tartarus is what you can take. Think wise and chose well, Jake."

T'saer stirred. Drode turned to Azrael. "Restrain him." Azrael nodded and looked at the shadow holding the fallen seraph. It put its ebony hand through T'saer's chest. T'saer slowly opened his eyes and looked around him. "Jake...." he muttered groggily. The shadow pulled at something in his chest and T'saer gasped and became quiet.

Fear grew within the boy, as the weight of responsibility was placed upon him once more. Whatever he decided now could change the fate of his entire world, of all the dimensions even! If he said yes, he and his friends would be saved while every other creature, every other being in the multi-universe would face damnation. If he said no, everyone he knew and loved would burn forever in the underworld.

"Don't.... listen to it..."

Jake turned his head. T'saer was speaking to him through clenched teeth.

"Quiet!" Drode hissed.

"Believe..."

"Save your breath!" Drode snapped. He turned to Azrael. "Put him to death!"

Azrael nodded. The shadow pulled at something then rose to its dark feet. T'saer gasped. "No....Jake....listen..." he gasped through ragged breaths. The shade lifted its hand again in a jerking motion with cut T'saer off. Menacingly, the shadow held its black fist tight. T'saer gave one last murmur and grew quiet.

"No!" yelled Jake.

Lzar-el stirred and slowly woke up at the noise. "What, Child... T'saer!" She sat up before the second shadow reached for her heart. "How dare you!" she screamed at the Crayak. "How dare you!" The second shadow plunged its icy hand around Lzar-el's heart and quickly pulled.

"How dare you!!" Lzar-el was now standing up, her long gray hair flowing out behind her. She took a stance, and with such authority and strength even greater than she ever possessed before, she threw her sword forward and aimed at the Crayak. The air around her glowed and cackled with the static.

The shade grabbed at her and pulled her down, but not before a streak of pure orange-silver light shot out from her and at the Crayak. It missed and hit the sky like a million explosions.

"Jake!" she called as she fell. Her hands were glowing bright like they were on fire. Never before had Jake ever seen a seraph so angrily. "Take my hand!" she yelled. Jake knew she was trying to give the bolted up power she had left, but the Drode punched him in the face, sending blood and spittle flying. He felt his hand waver and then another crushing blow was sent to it. The shades kept pulling her down, and their hands missed each other by a hair.

Lzar-el struggled but both shadows were now pulling at her heart. With the last bit of life she had, Lzar-el turned to face T'saer and kissed him tenderly on the mouth. A wistfully look danced briefly in her eyes. Then those eyes closed and both fallen seraphs turned to dust.

Jake's vision blurred as he turned away.

Drode looked at him. "Now what do we have here?" he sneered with false care. "A Child's tears! Time is up, by the way. Heaven or hell? What'd ya say?"

Jake wiped his face with his good arm and tried to sit up. "I... will not give up," he whispered.

Drode cackled. "That is your decision? To continue this useless struggle and face damnation?"

"I...I decide to fight...," Jake sat up. He turned to the Crayak with cold brown eyes, "and win!" He glanced at the sword and in a blink of an eye it was back in his hand, draw to it with a magical force. He raised the sword and slashed it across the Drode's leg. The Drode screamed and hopped away, clutching the bloody stump.

SO BE IT. The Crayak sent one more burst of fire. It headed straight toward Jake.

With one flash of the sword, Jake reflected the blow. The burning fire bounced off the sword and exploded in the Crayak's face.

NO! The Crayak howled in pain. DIE, CHILD AND BURN IN TARTARUS! It sent another shot.

"I will not die!" cried Jake. He stood up, leaning on his one good leg. "You can't kill me, Crayak."

YES I CAN!

"No," Jake hobbled closer to the steel throne. "You could have killed me as soon as I stepped into the Perfect World. But you didn't. That's because you can't."

The Crayak glared at the child. I POSSESS MORE POWER THAN YOUR FEEBLE MIND CAN EVER COMPREHEND!!

"But I am the First Child. As long as I believe.."

THAT IS NOT TRUE!! THE ORDER HAS LIED TO YOU! Yet Crayak had fear in its voice. YOU'RE JUST A LONE CHILD! YOU CANNOT DESTROY ME!

Jake smiled. He felt the strength grow in him. He wasn't alone. Somehow, he envisioned his two angels by his side. Young and beautiful once again, their presence was strong. Their hands were placed over his own, holding the silver sword with him.

The strength was building up. Jake felt like his arms were bursting with light, as if T'saer's determination and Lzar-el's final fury was being channeled to him. The energy flowed down his wrists, through his fingertips and into the hilt of the silver sword. Jake felt all

the power in the world flow through him: the strength of the earth, flame of fire, the howl of wind and the force of the sea. It was the most powerful feeling Jake had ever felt in his entire life.

The Crayak was building up his power too. His red eye glowed like the very pits of Hell, as he gained more power. I WILL DESTROY YOU, JAKE..... it growled.

Jake thought he saw Lzar-el smile at him with angelic grace. _Let your faith guide you..... _

--

In that split second, Jake let go of his energy. The flash blinded his eyes.

The Crayak released his power at the same time. The two flashes of light struck each other at the exact moment, and Jake felt himself being thrown into the air. The Crayak was screaming in agony when Jake lost conscious and the world turned black.

Chapter 14

JAKE.... JAKE, AWAKEN...

The boy opened his eyes to see that he was in the white marble home in the dimension of Time. He groaned put his hand to his head. Then he noticed it was whole, not broken. He looked down and saw that his injured leg was also healed.

CHILD, HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

Jake looked up to see G'briel at his bedside. "I-I think I'm okay. What happened?"

But before the Ellimist could explain, someone interrupted him.

"Jake!"

He looked behind the blue being to the doorway and smiled. "Cassie!"

Cassie ran from her place by the threshold and held Jake in her arms. "Oh, Jake," she cried, "No one knew if you'd ever wake up again. G'briel thought you lost your soul in the Perfect World..." She kissed him and grinned. "I'm so glad you're back."

Marco peeked in. "Aww," he said. "Isn't that a Kodak moment?"

Jake sat up on the stone bed. "Marco?"

"In the flesh."

Rachel then came in with Tobias on her shoulder, followed by Ax. I see that you are doing quite well, Prince Jake, Ax said, smiling with his eyes.

"Could someone tell me what was going on here?" Jake asked, grinning. Everyone was back! Jake was overjoyed. "Where's T'saer and

Lzar-el?"

Suddenly all the happy chatter stopped. G'briel looked gravely at Jake. THANKS TO YOU JAKE, THE CRAYAK WAS DEFEATED. T'SAER WAS RIGHT... WE HAD MADE A MISTAKE INTERPRETING THE PROPHECY, BUT HE DID THE RIGHT THING IN BRINGING YOU TO THE PERFECT WORLD TO DESTROY THE CRAYAK. AS FAR AS THE ORDER CAN TELL, THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION AT THE WESTERN CONTACT POOL, WHERE YOU ENTERED THE PERFECT WORLD. YOU WERE THROWN OUT OF THE GATES OF THE PERFECT WORLD AND BACK THROUGH THE PORTAL.

"What happened to the Perfect World?"

IN THE RESULTING COMBAT, IT WAS LEFT IN RUINS. HOWEVER, THE ORDER WILL WORK ON RESTORING THE PERFECT WORLD TO ITS ORIGINAL SPLendor IMMEDIATELY.

"What about-"

"Once Azrael was freed from the Crayak's procession, he brought us back to life," Cassie explained before Jake could finish his sentence.

"Then what about the faded seraphs?"

G'briel sighed. SPIRITS CANNOT DIE, BECAUSE A SPIRIT CONSISTS OF A SOUL AND SOULS ARE IMMORTAL. SO WHEN AZRAEL ELIMINATED THOSE SERAPHS, HE DESTROYED THE ONLY THING THEY HAD THAT GAVE THEM LIFE: THEIR SOULS. The Ellimist shook his head sadly. YOU CANNOT REVIVE A SOUL.

"So T'saer and Lzar-el...?"

THEY ARE GONE.

Jake suddenly slumped down. "They can't be..." he whispered shakily.

WHO REALLY KNOWS? G'briel said reassuringly. THERE ARE STILL UNKNOWN DIMENSIONS IN EXISTENCE. NO ONE KNOWS WHERE A SOUL GOES AFTER IT IS DESTROYED. THEY MAY EVEN EXIST IN A DIMENSION EVEN HIGHER THAN OUR PERFECT WORLD.

Jake nodded mutely.

YOU CHILDREN HAVE STAYED HERE TOO LONG, G'briel said. IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO RETURN TO YOUR OWN DIMENSION. The Ellimist snapped his fingers...

"Hey, Midget, sleeping in church?" Tom poked him in the shoulder. "Tsk, tsk, tsk. You know, in the olden days, I could have bonked you in the head with a mallet for such naughtiness." He shook his finger at his brother. "You practically snoozed through the whole sermon. Come on, we got to go."

Jake looked around. Everyone was filing out of the church. His dad looked at him with an arched eyebrow. "Hurry up there, Jake," he said. "We have to visit your cousins today, remember?"

Jake got up from his seat at the pew. Did he just dream the whole

experience? He had a feeling, though, that what he went through was very real.

He walked out of his pew and stepped into the main aisle. Everyone had pretty much left the church already. Even the minister had walked out into the back room to count the collection money. Jake was alone.

The boy walked down the aisle up to the statue at the front of the church. The stone angel looked ahead in quiet seriousness while the Virgin Mary had her hands spread open in a generous and forgiving pose.

Jake kneeled in front of the statue and whispered, "T'saer... Lzar-el... where ever you are, thanks. I'll-I'll be watching for you... when you come back." Jake did not dare say the word "if," for he truly believed that they were going to return someday. Jake knew how strong faith was.

"Hey Midget! Dad's starting up the car now! We're leaving!"

"Coming!" Jake looked back at the statue once more, then ran out of the room.

As the boy left, a single tear fell from the stone cheek of the angel, as the heavens mourned the loss of the fallen.

END OF BOOK ONE

End
file.